OFFA REX

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

The Queen of Hearts • Blackleg Miner • The Gardener • The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face
Flash Company • The Old Churchyard • Constant Billy (Oddington) / I'll Go Enlist (Sherborne)
Willie o' Winsbury • Bonny May • Sheepcrook and Black Dog • To Make You Stay

PRODUCED BY Tucker Martine and Colin Meloy

OFFA REX IS: Olivia Chaney, Colin Meloy, Chris Funk, Nate Query, Jenny Conlee, and John Moen

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1. THE QUEEN OF HEARTS 3:56

TRAD., ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY (WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC LTD.)

Olivia Chaney: Martin Carthy's extraordinary body of work never ceases to amaze me. His eponymous debut, which includes an exquisite setting of "The Queen of Hearts," remains as fresh and iconic, to my ears, as it must have sounded on its release back in 1965. The song, and his choice of text, which I chose to follow, is as timeless and moving a song as one can find. In Colin's words, "It's about heartbreak in the face of unrequited love; to my ears it's as fresh today as it was when it was written, three hundred years ago. That's kind of the spirit of the record."

Many American singers of the second folk revival knew of Martin's work (Joan Baez had already released her own inimitable and mournful version of this song, on 1963's *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*). Bob Dylan cites him as a clear and distinct influence in the early days, while Simon and Garfunkel's "Scarborough Fair" was directly inspired by Martin's typically original setting. I've occasionally sung alongside Martin and his wife, Norma Waterson, and have been lucky to work with their daughter, the incredible Eliza Carthy. I asked Martin if he minded me reinterpreting this song, and he generously said it was mine to do what I wanted with – that folk music doesn't "belong" to anyone. I hope my harpsichord rewrite for Offa Rex fits Martin's message, and our rendition carries the folk-rock sentiment of this album.

Olivia Chaney: lead vocals, electric harpsichord
Colin Meloy: acoustic twelve-string guitar
Chris Funk: electric guitar
Nate Query: electric bass
Jenny Conlee: Rhodes piano
John Moen: the drums
Anna Fritz: cello

2. BLACKLEG MINER 2:22

TRAD., ARR. COLIN MELOY (OSTEROZHNA MUSIC [BMI] / MUSIC OF STAGE THREE [BMI], ADMIN. BY BMG RIGHTS MANAGEMENT US, LLC.)

Colin Meloy: This is an early anti-strike-breaking tune from Northumberland that we learned, principally, from Steeleye Span. Seghill and Seaton Delaval are towns in Northumberland; a blackleg is a scab or strikebreaker. Apparently, blackleg miners were known to not wash their legs, so it distinguished them from the striking workers. This one dates back to the early/mid-19th century.

Colin Meloy: lead vocals, acoustic six-string guitar
Olivia Chaney: harmonium, backing vocals
Chris Funk: mandolin
Nate Query: electric bass
John Moen: the drums
Ralph Carney: bass clarinet

3. THE GARDENER 4:59

TRAD., ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY (WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC LTD.)

OC: Maddy Prior has such a special voice, and although there are many versions of this song from the great era of folk-rock, I became obsessed with hers and her then-husband Tim Hart's (from their 1969 album *Folk Songs of Old England, Vol. 2*). It took me a long time to come up with an arrangement that felt my own and natural in its following of the strange contours of melody and rhythm that carry the mysterious text.

Olivia Chaney: lead vocals, Dobro electric guitar
Nate Query: bass guitar
John Moen: the drums
Mirabai Peart: viola
Chris Funk: Autoharp, hammered dulcimer

4. THE FIRST TIME EVER I SAW YOUR FACE 3:31

EWAN MACCOLL (DAVID PLATZ MUSIC INC. [BMI], ADMIN. BY THE ROYALTY NETWORK / HARMONY MUSIC LTD. [PRS], ADMIN. BY BUCKS MUSIC GROUP LTD.), ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY

OC: Ewan MacColl was a songwriter of genius, and this song was a daunting proposition by Colin, but I loved the idea. Having grown up with both the iconic Peggy Seeger (original) and Roberta Flack cover versions, I hope I managed to imply my love and respect for both in this rendition of my own at the harmonium.

CM: I had always thought of this song as being a classic Atlantic R&B tune – and was surprised when I discovered it had been written by Ewan MacColl, the same guy who gave us "Dirty Old Town," a song I knew from The Pogues. Having uncovered the Peggy version for myself, I thought it would be an interesting experiment to try and move the needle back toward the original. I think we may have struck somewhere in between the two.

Olivia Chaney: lead vocals, harmonium

5. FLASH COMPANY 4:15

TRAD., ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY (WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC LTD.)

OC: Aka "The Yellow Handkerchief," and other titles. Many versions of this song exist – many recorded by some of my favourite trad singers, and some that I've heard live by lesser-knowns in folk clubs. I went back to the great English traveling-gypsy singer Phoebe Smith for my inspiration. I love the pathos in her voice. And the wry message in this powerful, timeless lyric was one that I could relate to. We recorded this on the final day with the studio clock ticking. We needed one more song, having cut some from the list. I hastily tried to write something relatively simple and earthy that the band and I could dig into quickly. While trying to maintain both its rousing and lamenting character, I set the song in common time (*4/4*) instead of Phoebe Smith's free waltz timing.

The take we've used was our first. I thought we were still busking our way through, but Tucker and the rest of the band persuaded me to embrace what we captured in that moment. And this is now what I love about it. It also amuses me that one of the songs I felt was the most "English" had unwittingly become a country song. Proving yet again the unexpected and truly transatlantic nature of our project!

Olivia Chaney: lead vocals, acoustic six-string guitar
Colin Meloy: electric guitar
Nate Query: electric bass
John Moen: the drums
Mirabai Peart: viola, backing vocals

6. THE OLD CHURCHYARD 4:07

TRAD., ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY (WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC LTD.)

OC: Waterson/Carthy – the great Norma Waterson (Martin Carthy's wife) is part of a singing family in the north of England, in Hull. They were integral to the folk revival and specifically to unaccompanied and harmony singing. I've always loved this song via their recording of it, and used to sing it a cappella at gigs when I'd begun delving back into traditional British song. I thought it would be fitting for this project as they learnt it from an American singer from Arkansas called Almeda Riddle (who also taught Norma a version of "Wayfaring Stranger"...). And so the tradition of the echoing back and forth between our cultures evolves and continues. My dear friend from Australia Mirabai Peart, now living in Portland, also came and lent her soulful viola playing (and voice) to this and a few other tracks, for which we're most grateful.

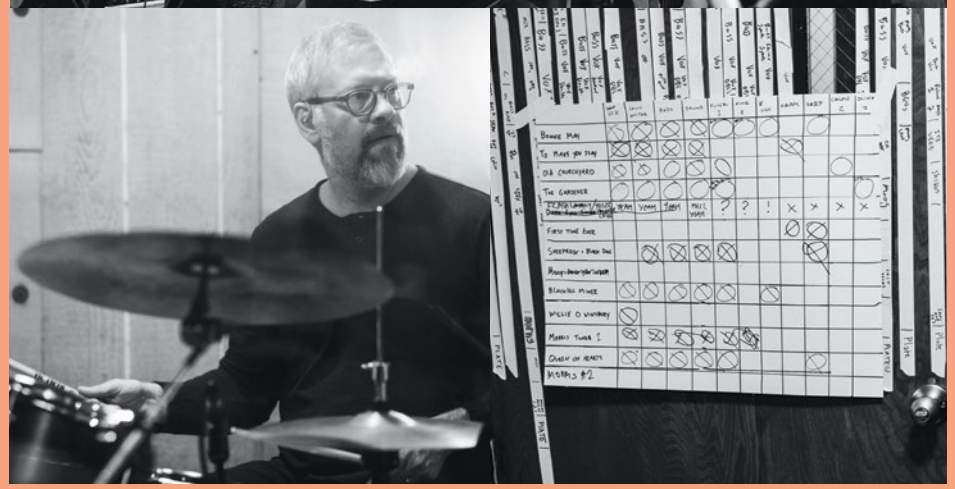
Olivia Chaney: vocals, harmonium
Colin Meloy: electric guitar
Nate Query: electric bass
John Moen: the drums
Mirabai Peart: viola
Ralph Carney: woodwind drone

7. CONSTANT BILLY (ODDINGTON) / I'LL GO ENLIST (SHERBORNE) 1:56

TRAD., ARR. JENNY CONLEE (DRIZOS MUSIC [BMI]), NATE QUERY (MUSICIAN'S LEISURELY PUBLISHING CO. [BMI]), JOHN MOEN (JACK VIKING MUSIC [BMI]), CHRIS FUNK (VIELLE A ROUE [ASCAP]) AND COLIN MELOY (OSTEROZHNA MUSIC [BMI] / MUSIC OF STAGE THREE [BMI], ADMIN. BY BMG RIGHTS MANAGEMENT US, LLC.)

CM: One of the main launching points for Offa Rex was the incredible versions of old Morris tunes that Ashley Hutchings arranged for the Albion Dance Band. This is us doing our Albion best; arrangements courtesy of Ms. Conlee.

Colin Meloy: electric guitar
Nate Query: electric bass
Chris Funk: electric guitar
Jenny Conlee: accordion
John Moen: the drums
Ralph Carney: bass clarinet



8. WILLIE O' WINSBURY 7:30

TRAD., ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY (WARNER/CHAPPELL MUSIC LTD.)

OC: I grew up with the music of Anne Briggs, and her rendition of this song has gone down, along with Andy Irvine's, as not only one of the great recordings, but also one of my favourite recordings of anything. This song was the seed of the project: Colin announced via Twitter that he wanted to hear me sing it, having listened to my album. That led to me supporting them on tour, and not long after Colin invited me to make a record with the band. But the song still seemed untouchable to me.
I was working on ideas at the piano, but they didn't feel right. So, mid-recording process, now in Portland, Tucker lent me his father's old Martin guitar from his studio, Flora Recording & Playback, to continue working on. Late one night, jet-lagged in my Airbnb, I gradually found a tuning and polyrhythmic part that the song could float over, un-impinged. I recorded a demo on my phone and sent it to the band. That led to us deciding to keep it intimate and pared down; just me, guitar and voice, Colin on nylon-string, and Nate on upright. Tucker captured the whole live take with us standing around one beautiful 1930s RCA ribbon mic. We just listened to each other in the room, no headphones, and played our way through the story of this poetic Child ballad. The only thing we added afterwards was my double-tracked guitar to bring more depth to the sound.

Olivia Chaney: vocals, acoustic six-string guitar
Nate Query: upright bass
Colin Meloy: nylon-string guitar

9. BONNY MAY 6:32

TRAD., ARR. JUNE TABOR (DOMINO PUB. CO. OF AMERICA) / OLIVIA CHANEY

OC: June Tabor was a singer I learnt so much from when I began to reassess my own voice and question why so many Brits sing with an American accent. To me Tabor is also an ingenious musician, who happens to sing. Those are often my favourite singers and storytellers. Her creation of this ballad and recording is so fine, and Colin persuaded me that we should pay homage and put it into our folk-rock collection. I agreed, if I could write our own arrangement, but he loved her version so much that he just kept wanting to be true to hers – so what we have is something of an amalgamation!

Olivia Chaney: lead vocals, harmonium, electric harpsichord
Colin Meloy: backing vocals, acoustic twelve- & six-string guitars
Chris Funk: electric guitar
Nate Query: electric bass
Jenny Conlee: Hammond organ
John Moen: the drums
Steve Drizos: congas

10. SHEEPCROOK AND BLACK DOG 4:35

MADELAINE PRIOR/FREDERICK KEMP/TIMOTHY HART/ROBERT JOHNSON & PETER KNIGHT (PEERMUSIC [UK] LTD), ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY

OC: Ashley Hutchings was one of the key driving forces behind the creation of "folk-rock." His push to revive "English" culture and English Morris dance tunes in particular, with electric bass in Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span, changed the sound of music during the '60s and '70s, along with Joe Boyd's production ear. I hope Offa Rex pays some homage to those innovations. This setting we, therefore, kept pretty straight, with a hint of a collective love of Black Sabbath and their nod to British folk.
CM: Early heavy metal turns out to be a kind of strange sibling to the British folk revival. There are plenty of odd intersects between the two movements: Sabbath traded in nods to early paganism and fairy tales; Sandy Denny lent her voice to Zeppelin's "The Battle of Evermore." This tune, as we had learned from Steeleye Span, always struck me as sounding fairly metal. This was our attempt to put it squarely in that place.

Olivia Chaney: vocals, electric harpsichord
Colin Meloy: electric guitar
Chris Funk: electric guitar
Nate Query: electric bass
Jenny Conlee: Hammond organ
John Moen: the drums, gong

11. TO MAKE YOU STAY 5:02

LAL WATERSON (NORTHWORKS [MCPS] / CELTIC MUSIC [PRS]), ARR. OLIVIA CHANEY

CM: This song was written by the late, great Lal Waterson. It originally appeared on the seminal *Bright Phoebus*, a record Lal made with her brother Mike in 1972. I based this cover on an earlier demo version of the song from Fledg'ling Records' excellent demo compilation, *Teach Me to Be a Summer's Morning*. The sentiment is so simple and sad.

Colin Meloy: lead vocals, acoustic six-string guitar
Olivia Chaney: harmonium, piano, backing vocals
Nate Query: electric bass
John Moen: the drums

Produced by **Tucker Martine and Colin Meloy**

Arrangements by **Olivia Chaney**, except where noted

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